THE COURTAULDIAN ISSUE 35

RE:VISION

Editor's Note

To be fair, the RE:VISION opening night was a banger. Well over a year's preparation came to a dramatic finale for the East Wing Biennial, organised by students, at our Vernon Square campus. In an institution that can sometimes be a little insular, it really felt like everyone was celebrating together.

Since then however, it might be easy to think that the exhibition has quietly dissipated and faded to the background of students' minds, frozen in place for the next two years in our corridors and classrooms (ignoring, that is, the phenomenal programme of talks, tours, and outreach organised by the East Wing team since its opening). But exhibitions don't die on opening night. They are born. And in a year, RE:VISION will still be there for all to appreciate, criticise, and exist with.

This year's mid-term issue, fittingly a first in six years at The Courtauldian, acknowledges the middle bit. It is just as important as any opening or closing ceremony.

Tien Albert

Editor-in-Chief

Director's Note

In the three and a half decades since the first East Wing exhibition opened in 1991, the fundamental ethos of the project has remained the same. Connection, collaboration, community.

This publication marks a first in East Wing Biennial history. A quarter of the way through the show's run, it provides an opportunity for students to respond to and reflect on the works of art that now make up the fabric of everyday life at the Courtauld.

RE:VISION reminds us that history is a dynamic force, constantly rewritten by those who engage with it. As polarisation increasingly threatens to separate us, open dialogue has never felt more urgent.

So please, continue to talk to each other about the exhibition. Engage. Share your opinions. I hope that RE:VISION can be a platform for conversation. This issue is dedicated to each and every person who will pass through these halls over the next two years and continue to give meaning to the exhibition.

Romy Brill Allen

Director, RE:VISION - East Wing Biennial 16

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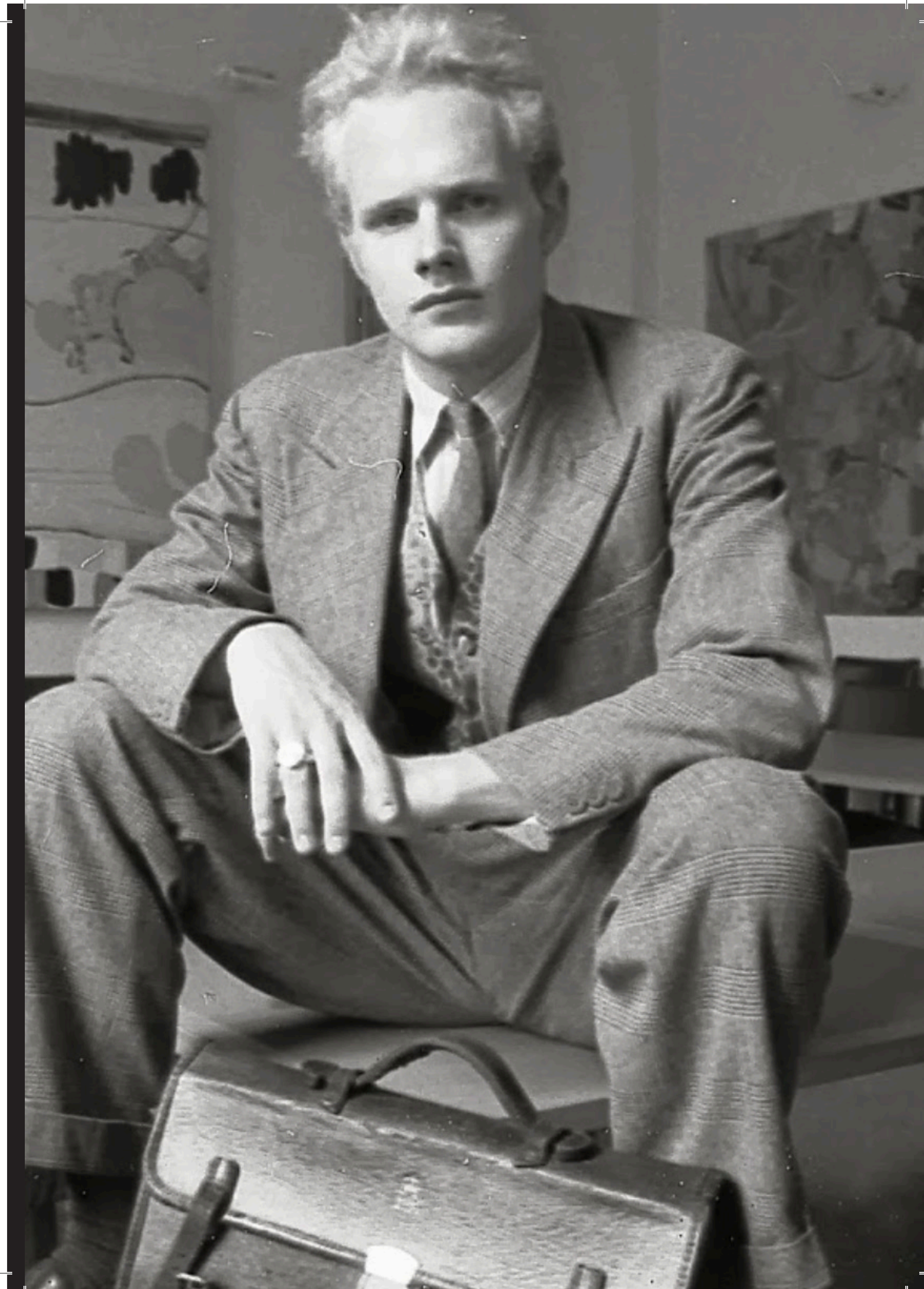
TODAY: THEN AND NOW

A Brief History of Contemporary Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art

By Maria Cicala



Today, Vernon Square is filled with contemporary art. Walking through the Edwardian halls, it's impossible not to feel connected to the art of today. From freshly tufted textiles to site-specific sound art, RE:VISION joins a long tradition of bridging the study of history of art to contemporary art production. For the past 35 years, the East Wing Biennial has reflected the Courtauld's student body's growing interest in contemporary art, fully curated, organised, and mobilised by students who have spurred the tradition onward. One of the most unique qualities of the Courtauld Institute today is the way in which it has wholeheartedly embraced contemporary art in both practice and theory, particularly in contrast to other art institutions with more traditional outlooks. Critical engagement with contemporary art feels particularly relevant and representative of both the field's increasing diversity and the ever-shifting landscape of the art industry. Many Courtauldians value the possibilities that contemporary art represents and have a clear interest in chasing them, with ample institutional support. From a new crop of societies to ongoing events with artists and notoriously sought-after modules, the student body clearly has one foot in the classroom and the other in the gallery. In 2026, it's difficult to imagine a Courtauld Institute that isn't voraciously interested in contemporary art, but that wasn't always the case.

The Courtauld Institute of Art was founded in 1932 in Home House, the Portman Square home of Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld. Surrounded by the Courtauld collection of impressionist art, students worked amongst Manet, Cézanne, and Renoir. As the Courtauld's collection grew alongside public interest, the Gallery and Institute split in the 1950s, with the publicly accessible gallery moving to Woburn Square and teaching remaining in Home House. While the academic reputation of the Courtauld gained increasing influence and prestige, the founding early-20th-century ethos of a closed, intimate setting for study amongst a private collection became less relevant. By the time the Institute and Gallery were once again united at Somerset House's North Wing in 1989, Courtauld's collection was already self-sufficiently established as a distinguished gallery. So how did a truly impressive slate of art from the emerging Young British Artists (YBAs) end up in dialogue with this institution?

Our story begins in 1991, when

a tenacious BA student revolted against the empty walls of the then-new Somerset House campus. With a faculty composed mostly of acclaimed classicists and a student body that nearly unanimously favoured the Renaissance over Rothko, the Courtauld Institute of the 1990s was more of an established, renowned wooden handle rather than a brilliant cutting edge. While Damien Hirst, Gilbert and George, and Tracey Emin embraced the emerging ethos of wild living and sensationalism in East London, it was business as usual at the Courtauld, consistently publishing preeminent scholarship from the vantage point of the historic Somerset House. Against all odds (and one year before the label of Young British Artist was even coined), these worlds collided thanks to Joshua Compston.

If you have been to Vernon Square you've seen Joshua Compston. Blond-haired, blue-eyed, and undoubtedly self-assured, Compston greets every visitor to the Courtauld's current home. Since 2024, Nicola Green's 2006 triptych has hung in the reception. Compston was a firecracker from the start, as his close friend and biographer, artist Darren Coffield, recalls. With close ties to the emerging YBA movement (Coffield included), Compston found the disparity between the leading institution for the study of art history and the radical direction of contemporary artists and the art industry in London upsetting. He proposed a loan scheme for the Institute, in which contemporary art would be acquired for the students. Through the visionary support of Director Michael Kauffman and funding from the Duchess of Westminster (who, after the two-year loan period, owned the artwork in the first show and turned a considerable profit), Compston was able to subsidise his controversial enterprise. With only a handful of contemporary art galleries in the city, Compston navigated a more accessible scene, directly contacting artists and dealers on behalf of the newly established Courtauld Loan Collection. Shaking hands with a freshly graduated Damien Hirst and meeting for coffee with Howard Hodgkin, Compston curated a collection of 17 contemporary artists. Compston and a few friends hung the artworks themselves, causing much skepticism from the more traditional faculty and students.

The great turning point for Compston's ambition came on November 27th, 1991, when the Courtauld Loan Collection

opened its doors for a lavish and well-attended opening night party. Word about the exhibition spread through the small but influential contemporary art circle and spread outward to the greater art world. It seems to have been a night so energetic that it may have just been the final push in convincing the Courtauld's concervative student body of the value of contemporary art. Dealers and students mingled, sharing their interests from two poles of the art world. One such dealer recounts that he introduced a group of students to the work of Mark Rothko over white wine during the evening. Compston's ambitions of making a real impact in the institute spiralled outward and collided with the wider growing influence of contemporary art in the early 21st Century. While he helped with the organisation of the second Courtauld Loan Collection two years after its debut, the project was now in the hands of the larger student body. Compston kept going, and so did his influence at the Courtauld.

Back in the reception of Vernon Square in 2026, Joshua Compton looks down upon the new campus, a testament to his success in radically redefining the Institute. However, this painting tells the tale of two East Wing Biennials. Somewhere along the way, the East Wing Collection became a more structured enterprise, establishing itself both within the Institute and the larger art world. The student-led exhibition has been the subject of two reviews in *The Guardian*, collaborated with national and international charities and events, and featured upcoming contemporary artists whose work is now held in major museum collections. From 17 amateurishly hung paintings stemmed one of the most impressive initiatives in the Institute's history. 15 years after the opening of the original East Wing Collection and 10 years after Compston's untimely passing, portraitist Nicola Green immortalised Compston's presence in a 2006 triptych titled *The Late Joshua Compston*. The piece was originally exhibited in the 8th East Wing Biennial, themed On Time, where it placed the biennial tradition in direct dialogue with its own history for the first time. By this point, the East Wing Biennial had experimented with several themes and media within contemporary art. *On Time* provided a springboard for a more concerted and cohesive archive of the East Wing Biennial, building a unique historical record by and for students. With the help of faculty who had themselves been involved in past Biennials,

EXHIBITION ENDS HERE

Nonsense
Purveyors of the Notorious Dream"
presents
The Hybrid "Pop Culture" Extravaganza
30 JULY

FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST TO MARY MAGDALEN
coming to your screams
June 23
S.S. EXCESS
1993
Olivia Lloyd
Zoe Benbow
Jason Brooks
Mona Kher
Piers Wardle
James Robinson
FACTUAL NONSENSE
44a Charlotte Road London EC2A 3PD
Tel: 071-613 5048 Fax: 071-613 5780

NONSENSE
first
"Party"

HENRY BOND
HELEN CHADWICK
TRACEY EMIN
ANDREW HERMAN
STUART BRISLEY
MAT COLLISHAW
ANGUS FAIRHURST
GARY HUME

TWENTY FOUR YEARS
of
Joshua Compston Esq.
on
27 May 1994
at
18 Charlotte Road, London EC2
please arrive promptly between 8.30 & 8.45pm
BRING A BOTTLE
Absolute Secrecy must be observed prior to the event

Abstractions from
Domestic Suburb Scene (Sin)
PRIVATE VIEW 13 August 1992 6-9pm
Hilary Wilson
Darren Coffield
Michael Robertson
Michael Kerr
Ane Vester
Jason Brooks
Mary Nicholson
Rebecca Bower
A.P.C.
Joanne Thorpe
David J. Smith
With guest appearance of Takis's 'Unlimited' Signals
Exhibition curated and designed by
Joshua Compston & Violet Fraser

Factual FN Nonsense
NOTICE TO HOXTON SQUARE RESIDENT
AND CAR OWNERS IN THE VICINITY
ON THE 30 JULY 1994 AN EVENT CALLED THE FE
THAN DEATH WILL BE HELD IN HOXTON SQUAR
N1 AND SURROUNDING ENVIRONS.
IT'S PRIMARY AIM IS TO RAISE THE PROFILE
OF LONDON AND IT AIMS TO D
CULTURAL EXTRAVAGANZA OF
MUSIC, ARTIST'S PERFORMANC
THE HOURS OF 10AM TO 12PM
AS A RESULT OF THIS IT WILL
WEST SIDE OF THE SQUARE F
RESIDENTS PARKING RIGHTS
THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD IN
THE ONE WAY SYSTEM CURRE
SUSPENDED.
THIS ACTION IS TAKEN WITH
LONDON BOROUGH OF HACK
TRANSPORTATION DEPARTM
POLICE.
WE APOLOGISE FOR THE INC
YOU AND THE LATE ARRIVAL
IF YOU HAVE ANY ENQUIRIES
COMPSTON OR GEORGE DRE
THANKING YOU IN ADVANCE
29 JULY 1994
director: Joshua Compston
44a Charlotte Road, London EC2A 3PD Telephone 071 613 5048

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The Publicat
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24
Wednesday-Sat

THRESHER

the archive featured promotional materials, catalogues, official correspondence, and memorabilia kept in the Somerset House library collection. Chloe Nelkin, a member of the executive board of *On Time*, recalls that the edition uniquely sought to connect the industry-minded students with academic practice, thus initiating the first steps towards organising and preserving the Biennial's history. 16 years after its founding, the Courtauld's exhibition of contemporary art had already grown enough to collect and create its own history, bolstered by its initial mythology and driven by the engagement and interest of the student body.

2018 saw another shift in the East Wing tradition, led by its student-organisers. *SURGE*, the show's 13th edition, shifted its focus away from contemporary art galleries and towards fresh-off-the-studio hypercontemporary pieces. Rosie Martyr, registrar for *SURGE*, shared that this was both practical and conceptual. As the edition struggled to secure sufficient funding, Martyr and the executive and curatorial boards instead flooded MA art shows in London to source the entire exhibition. Fully composed of freshly graduated artists, *SURGE* nodded back to the original East Wing Collection. Without venturing further than Camberwell, *SURGE* brought together an impressive slate of international artists, reflecting the immediate concerns and indulgences of hypercontemporary art practice in London, just like Joshua Compston in 1991. At the closing of *SURGE* in early 2020, Eleanor Goodman, Head of Exhibition, wrote a letter to the executive committee of the upcoming 14th edition. "Now the fun begins! Best of Luck," she signed off. Unfortunately, the 14th edition was never realised as in-person classes were suspended due to the global pandemic in March of 2020. The Courtauld Institute of Art's campus in Somerset House emptied as students dispersed. Galleries locked their doors, and the seminar room lights were turned off. No longer did it matter that the walls were empty, as there was nobody to see them. Renovations began, and a majority of teaching (along with the Institute's library) moved to Vernon Square in King's Cross.

With the return of in-person instruction, students settled into their new home at Vernon Square. They were placed in the same position Joshua Compston found himself in the Northeast Wing of Somerset House three decades prior. By 2022, the academic and social landscape of the

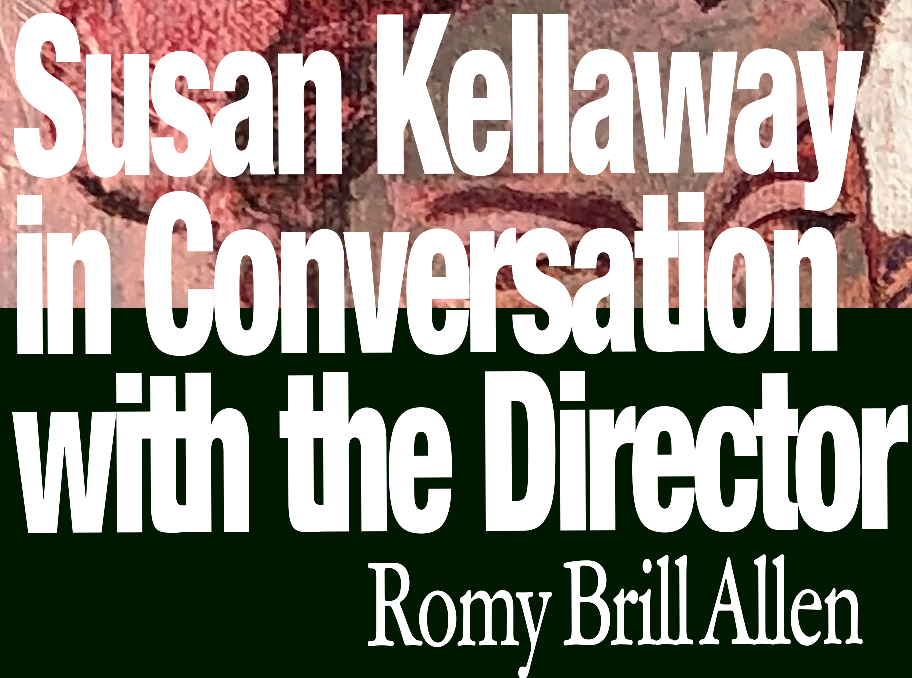
Institute had evolved into a much more familiar environment, with a robust output of research and teaching on contemporary art and a student body keenly familiar with Thursday evening gallery openings and Instagram networking. Gone were the days of the little pioneering contemporary art galleries, making the lack of art on the Institute's walls even more stark. With the guidance of Professor Sarah Wilson (Joshua Compston's personal tutor), BA students Amy-May Brand, India Harvey, and Louisa Hutchinson revived the project under the updated title of *Vernon Square 1* (VS1). With the theme of *Embodiment*, Brand, Harvey, and Hutchinson curated and hung artwork throughout the new Vernon Square Campus, marking the Institute's transition into the new building and bringing a bit of the East Wing to Vernon Square. The exhibition was centred on Joshua Compston's legacy as foundational to the contemporary Institute and was generously supported by several faculty and administrative members who themselves participated in past Biennials. Alongside contemporary artworks, *Embodiment* also undertook an archive of the early history of the East Wing Biennial, including hanging several pieces from the 9th edition *Exhibitionism* throughout the first floor, and an open archive of Joshua Compston's work beyond the Biennial on the third floor. *VS1* extended the narrative intentions of *On Time*, treating Compston not only as a fellow student but also as an art historical figure, a direct testament to his legacy and impact.

What was once a rigid institution with its eyes trained on the past has blossomed into a fluid web of intersectionality and social care. The students whose academic practice developed alongside the Institute's direct involvement in contemporary art are today themselves leaders in art and academia. This environment gives way to collaboration and openness amongst a richly diverse faculty and student body, and the collaboration we know today has, in part, been influenced by Joshua Compston and the longevity of the East Wing Biennial. The opportunity for active involvement with contemporary art production reflects a larger, fundamental shift within art history and the greater art world which Compston captured at the perfect time, leaving a mark much larger than himself in the Institute and beyond.

Today, the East Wing Biennial is in its 16th edition, and it inhabits a much changed Courtauld.

RE:VISION opened in Vernon Square in 2025, restoring the "East Wing Biennial" title to the project in an effort to ensure a cohesive continuation between its history and present. Like the 16 editions before it, RE:VISION is primarily a reflection of the student body's interests, anxieties, and priorities. It investigates the power of historical narratives and impositions through contemporary art. With a more established student presence in Vernon Square, this incarnation of the Biennial project is more attuned to the simultaneous past and present of the exhibition. With artists chosen from both a digital open call and through virtual gallery inquiries, the curatorial process nods to early EWB gallery soliciting and later focus on platforming of early-career artists. In considering the materials, stories, and alumni network we inherited in organising this project, the EWB16 executive team decided to create a centralised archive of the past 35 years of the East Wing Biennial. The process of connecting with alumni and uncovering the history of such a monumental project has been incredibly revelatory. The East Wing Biennial, to me, is a testament to the power of the student body to enact change and shift the Institution to better reflect contemporary thought. Joshua Compston had ambition, an energy that was enough to sustain 35 years of interest and active involvement in his original project. Every two years, in the hands of brand-new perspectives, passions, circumstances, and venues, the Biennial is a forum for students to enact change and express action beyond the academic and within a localised community. What a privilege it has been to look to the past, and what a joy it is to not know what's next.

Opposite: Blancmange Rabbit, after Manet, 2024, oil and pencil on canvas, 40 x 60 cm



Susan Kellaway in Conversation with the Director

Romy Brill Allen

An interview was conducted following an event held at the Courtauld Institute in November 2025 as part of the RE:VISION: *In Conversation* Series. Inspired by the content of the talk, this article is a loose transcript of the discussion between artist Susan Kellaway and RE:VISION Director Romy Brill Allen. The publication of this conversation celebrates the installation of Kellaway's third work in the exhibition, *Grazing Ground* (2023), which was installed in January 2026 to reflect the changing and growing nature of the East Wing Biennial.

Romy Brill Allen: Can you describe the three artworks featured in RE:VISION?

Susan Kellaway: *Blancmange Rabbit, after Manet* (2024) is based on Manet's *Chez le Père Lathuille* and *The Blonde with Bare Breast*. I swapped the loving (if not leery!) sailor's head for Frank Sinatra, and instead of returning his affection, the woman's attention is on the blancmange

rabbit. I have memories of this desert from birthday party food. It becomes a kind of failed seduction. The onlookers, who are dressed in medieval headwear, scowl in the background, in a setting that feels suburban, with white picket fences. I made this just after graduating, once I had moved out of my Oxford studio, so my work got smaller. But I also felt more confident about directly 'stealing' from art history and twisting it into my own narratives. It feels cheekier and more direct that way.

"*Should I Get the Bill?*" (2024) is directly inspired by a Lorenzo di Credi painting of Mary. In that painting she is clasping her hands in prayer, full of anxiety and hope. I liked the idea of that deep wish to be saved. A damsel in distress is pounced upon by a leering knightly 'saviour'. She wishes her ruby-red shoes would take her home, while a patriotic angel flies overhead, offering no salvation, just the bill. Mary Magdalen is typically depicted covered with hair; I swapped this out to have manicured pubes. I made this right in the middle of my degree, and it's built on layers of mistakes (it has not one but *two* abandoned paintings underneath!). It ended up being a turning point for me, and it has won me two prizes. I think people respond to the charged confidence of it, and the fact that it feels both playful and uncomfortable.

Grazing Ground (2023) is about ceremony and collective joy. The imagery comes from digging around in old family photographs, so you get this strange mix of things like pub interiors, dartboards, dogs playing poker, and children waiting for their round of orange juice at the bar. It is a bit nostalgic and a bit absurd at the same time. Because it

Previous page: Blancmange Rabbit, after Manet, 2024, oil and pencil on canvas, 40 x 60 cm

was made a few years ago, it feels strange seeing it spotlighted now. It almost feels like someone else's work, or like looking back at an earlier version of myself.

RBA: How do you use the distortion of bodies to *re-present* traditional ideas about gender, identity, or femininity?

SK: I like painting jelly-like, soft bodies and exaggerating certain forms because it pushes things away from realism and into something more performative. Gender in my work often feels like costume. The men are usually dressed as characters, sailors, cowboys, knights, sheriffs, while the women carry more of the emotional weight. They show strength and fatigue, shame and seduction all at once. I want them to feel a bit over the top and slightly uncomfortable.

My paintings explore shame and seduction. I return to allegories. They're played off against each other like dolls I have pushed together. They're left to fend for themselves, armed with humour in the absurdity of their settings. Their expressions flit between contempt, exhibitionism, guilt, ecstasy, and lethargy. I work in marshmallow-pinks and custard-yellows to sweeten and seduce the viewer into my sardonic, sexually transgressive perspective.

RBA: How do you view these works as revisions of the cultural visual canon?

SK: I start with images that already carry cultural weight (using art history, pop culture, archetypes etc.) and then I twist them into my own narratives, usually by swapping out a face or changing where someone is looking. With Manet's *The Blonde with Bare Breast*, the protagonist stares off into the distance. I was interested in filling in that gap and asking what she might actually be thinking about. I liked the idea that it could be something silly and kitsch, like a blancmange rabbit, rather than anything grand or romantic.

RBA: Describe your 'creative process' in relation to these works. How did you start? How did it end? How do these cultural references come to you? Are your works pre-planned or collaged as you work?

Grazing Ground, 2023, acrylic and paper cutouts on canvas, 60 x 110 cm

SK: I collage an image to give myself an entry point, but honestly I often get too excited and start painting before I have fully thought things through. Then I have to grapple with what I am left with, and sometimes that works out, and sometimes I start again.

With "*Should I Get the Bill?*", there are layers of abandoned paintings underneath, so the final image really grew out of mistakes and frustration as much as intention. The references come from things I have collected and sat with for a while, and painting is where I start to tell the narrative I actually want, even if I do not fully know what that is at the beginning.

During my summer residency with *Dazed* magazine, I kept painting women surrounded by trees. It was subconscious, but when I saw everything together at the final exhibition it was very obvious. I can guess at what that might mean, but I think part of getting better as an artist is trusting and following my subconscious. Letting it lead rather than trying to control everything from the start.

RBA: Given how religious themes (sin, suffering, guilt) appear in your work, how do you feel these works speak to spiritual experience? What does it mean for you on a personal level to revise religious iconography in a contemporary context?

SK: I am a painter who revisits the tension and irony of my girlhood and my own lapsed Catholic education. It was a dizzying time infused with the weight of a feminised religious guilt and a simultaneous infatuation with pop culture. At school, one teacher told us it "wasn't a school for slags" when we were caught wearing make-up. This happened beneath the gaze of a bare-chested, near-naked Jesus, dying in ecstasy on every classroom wall.

When I use religious imagery, it is not about faith in a straightforward sense, but about how shame, desire, suffering, and spectacle all get tangled up. Revising religious iconography is personal for me because it lets me question who these images were serving, and how they shape bodies and behaviours.

RBA: Your paintings often feel like vignettes but they don't always

tell a linear narrative. In what ways are you revising traditional storytelling in painting, and how do you want the viewer to construct meaning or narrative from your images?

SK: I like the idea of the paintings feeling like cartoons. "What happens next?" They are more like moments you have walked in on. My influences range from pop culture to painters like Chantal Joffe, Beryl Cook, and Marie Laurencin, as well as films like Sofia Coppola's, where mood, tone, atmosphere often matters more than plot.

RBA: Have you noticed any trends in reactions of viewers to your works? Is it always what you expect, or do they take on a life of their own?

SK: People often find the work more confronting than I do, which I think is just because I have spent so long with these images that they feel quite familiar to me.

RBA: Your imagery often plays with themes of power, seduction, and voyeurism. How do you think your representations challenge or invert the traditional "gaze" in painting?

SK: My paintings often include naked figures, and it is not something I overthink. I just find the female body the most beautiful thing to paint, so it feels strange to me when that causes hesitation or discomfort.

I have an upcoming show that I was given as an emerging artist prize a couple of years ago, and now that it may finally be happening comes the news that there can be no nipples or genitals. And the body becomes something seedy. My first thought was that I would have to start choosing clothes to put my figures in, and that just felt boring. I would get bored of the clothes, but I never get bored of the body.

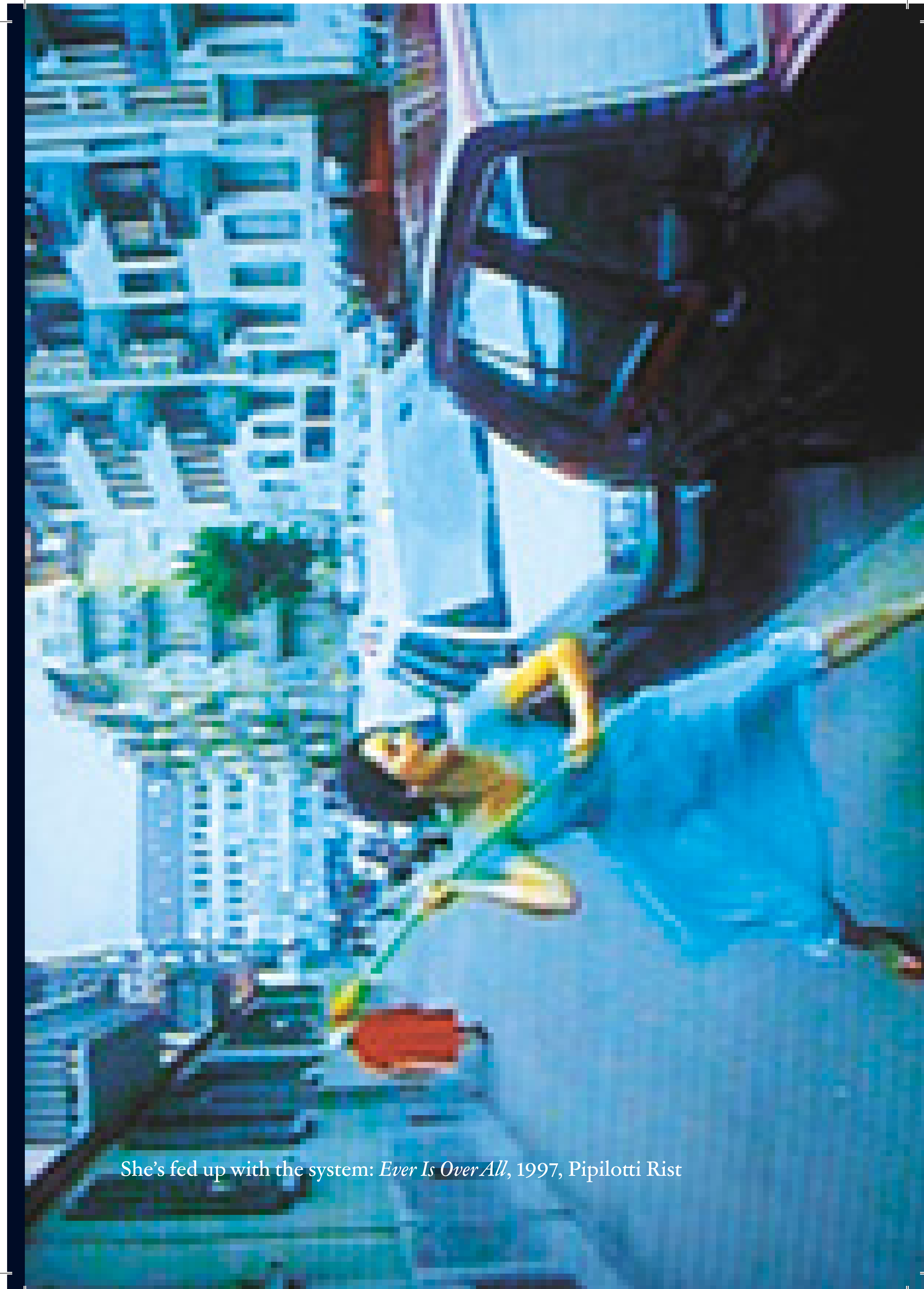
Body Electric:

By Lexie Patterson

The Unruly World of Pipilotti Rist

Step into the kaleidoscopic chaos of Pipilotti Rist's imagination, where the female body dances in riot of electric hues. A Swiss visual artist, Rist is best known for her immersive video installations and experimental moving-image work. She emerged in the 1980s and 90s as a leading artist in the expansion of video art into large-scale, sensorial environments. She even calls herself Pippi Longstocking, and like the fictional heroine, she invites us to play along on a wild, disorientating adventure. This is a realm of pure sensation, pulsing with buzz and restless energy. For too long, the female body has been muted; for Rist, it is released, saturated, and defiantly alive in an acidic palette.

On the walls of the Courtauld at



She's fed up with the system: *Ever Is Over All*, 1997, Pipilotti Rist

‘The calm of the bedroom, the heat of sex, and the coolness of the afterglow’: Pricking Goosebumps and a Humming Horizon, 2023, Pipilotti Rist

Vernon Square, in Seminar 4, we are offered a direct window into Rist's world. The video still presents a nude woman from a low angle. Her presence is expressive and unapologetic. We are drawn into the work through its liberating choreography, reaching out from institutional walls, invited to participate in a dance that collapses distance between artwork, body and viewer. Her arm seems to reach out toward us, pulling us into her orbit and sharing her liberty on her own terms. The caption reads: 'Stay, dear homo'. Come, dance the dance. It's a call to remain; to look, and to encounter the body on Rist's own terms.

There are undeniably aggressive, raw undertones in the flushed redness of the body and the exposed breast. The flesh feels insistently physical rather than idealised, charged with heat and presence, resisting any easy slide into softness or passivity. This is not an idealised, stiff Renaissance nude, nor a slimy, macho vision of Picasso's making. It is a liberated re-visioning of the female body, seen through a lens that makes desire its own subject. It invites more primal, unfiltered freedom. Loose, uncontained, slippery, a vision of a body that can no longer be pinned.

Apart from a trace of green, perhaps grass, in the background, white almost engulfs the frame. The effect is near spiritual, as if we are witnessing an apparition. Her body sems to emerge from the glare, sharply defined against the surrounding brightness. Her hair sweeps across the image, carrying us with it, pulling the viewer into her expressive movement. Rist speaking for Hauser & Wirth, describes her work as 'like a journey through the body, or a helter-skelter'. It is as if we are stepping into a hazy dream.

The work resists the perfect realism of the digital camera. Instead, the red seems to seep out from the rectangular pixels, as if paint were bleeding into the groves of a canvas. In *Art in America*, Rist argues that the glitching quality is psychologically important, reflecting the way our bodies 'glitch' too. There is a deliberate tension in the medium itself. The cold precision of digital technology set against the fragile, vulnerable flesh it records.

Nothing, however, is as openly angry and expressive as her famous video installation *Ever is Over All*, 1997, elements of which are later channelled into *Stay Dear Homo*. This is the female body in action. Here, Rist strolls down a New York street holding

a large porcelain flower, which she uses with deliberate violence to smash parked cars. When a police officer approaches, we anticipate punishment. But no. Instead, the female officer, nods in approval. They're tired of the patriarchal structures imposed upon them. She sees destruction as the only response. For Rist, the system must be crushed and dismantled.

All the signals we associate with femininity, the dress, the red heels, the flower, are suddenly subverted and weaponised. What is meant to signal delicacy becomes a source of power, and the effect is wonderfully liberating. Go Rist, go! Beyoncé took inspiration from the film in her music video, 'Hold Up', where she wields a baseball bat, similarly smashing cars in an angry, gleeful act of protest. There is no unbroken glass in sight. Down with the patriarchy they say. Rist's work has seeped into culture more deeply than we often realise. The female body has long been read as a delicate flower. For Rist, that fragility can be turned into a weapon. *Stay Dear Homo* is the same. She is vulnerable and strong at once and refuses to be simplified.

Rist told *The Guardian* that she is a feminist 'politically' but not 'personally'. It's a curious distinction; the kind artists often make when they sense that a label may pin their work down too neatly. Yet the old feminist maxim still holds: the personal is always political, and the body is never neutral. The body, especially the female body in art, has never been a neutral territory. It arrives already freighted with centuries of looking, judging and owning, shaped by a long visual tradition in which women were so often the subjects of the gaze rather than its authors.

So, the real question is not whether Rist chooses to call herself a feminist, but what her images actually *do*. And what they do is quietly tamper with the logic of the gaze. Her camera refuses the tidy conventions of looking. Skin becomes landscape and the body is magnified, fragmented, dissolved into colour and texture. It no longer politely sits within the borders of the frame.

Instead, it spills outward. The body in Rist's work is unstable, immersive, and gloriously unruly, something that resists containment, refusing the neat order that has historically made the female body so easy to consume. In her hands, it becomes less an object to be observed than an emotive experience that the

viewer is pulled into.

In her more recent work, *Prickling Goosebumps & a Humming Horizon*, 2023, Rist places a bed inside the gallery, her signature light projections washing the space in saturated colour. It feels as if she has projected the colours of feeling itself. The calm of the bedroom, the heat of sex, and the coolness of afterglow. The work forms a kind of comfort, an immersive refuge. In *Art in America*, Rist claims that she wants visitors of her exhibition to feel 'their whole body welcomed'. Where her early work seemed to obtain an urgent drive and raw potency, this new installation feels more pared back and oceanic than the electric charge of the artist in 'Ever is Over all'. Grace Byron, writing for *Frieze*, argued that Rist's work is meant to comfort the viewer, not 'castigate her'. Still, one can't help but wonder whether the comfort has become a little too dominant. The rebellion that once pulsed through her imagery now feels subdued, dissolved into the lush atmosphere of the installation. What was once mischievous and dangerous, risks drifting into something softer, a kind of airy-fairy oasis.

And yet, the charge of Rist's oeuvre remains unmistakably electrifying. To sit and study in the same room as one of her works feels like a privilege. As in *Ever Is Over All*, Rist shatters the glass of earlier images and replaces them with a fresh perspective. It feels alive. Her work insists on the liberating freedom of the human body and on the right to be seen on one's own terms.

In an institution, in a seminar room, where we so often study the female body as representation, catalogued, theorised, pinned into a long history of images, Rist's work becomes disruptive. It refuses that tidy, neat order of things. What she offers instead is a new way of seeing, one that disrupts and unsettles the familiar logic of the gaze. As in *Ever Is Over All*, where a modern-day Pippi Longstocking gleefully smashes the glass of the everyday, Rist reminds us that the rules of looking are not fixed. They can be broken, and once broken, they rarely go back together the same way.

Monkey Say, Mon-Key-Do: AI, Creation, and Copy-right Law

By Harry Laventure

As a variation on the theme of RE:VISION, it may be the writer's fair privilege to presuppose that copyright law is unlikely to leap to mind as associatively as a cavalry horse to the bugle. And yet, what is the law if not the product of continual examination following challenge to the harmony of the status quo – perpetual revision tending to the outcry of its times, with the past as its informant and the future in mind. Law mutates in all its continual liquidity, but with each case enjoys an instant of solid and refined application. Rather, to take Bergson's assistive notion of *durée* in the wake of Tomlins' assessment, it is the 'experience of ceaseless becoming'. It must be apprehended to reanimate in new, more pertinent form; it must be revised.

Helpful for my justification of inclusion in this magazine, we are here greeted by a set of thematically apt, unique debates within the markedly elastic quality of our own times. Image-making, AI, and artistic rights are not yet under the legislative scrutiny they will soon be forced to elicit. But the first preludes of tremors in our great legal architecture signal incoming durability tests of immense magnitude and repercussion, relevant to the arts we hold so dear. How does copyright reconfigure itself to handle images designed by an inhuman intelligence? How may we conceive of artistic influence on a machine? Can the biproduct of independently animated coding be correctly classified as art? And, if so, where does the buck stop in terms of intellectual property? Well, the floor is ours.

Following a few skirmishes in the US, the United Kingdom has recently made its debut as legal amphitheatre for such a debate. On 4th November this year just passed, the High Court pronounced its judgement on the case of Getty Images vs Stability AI. The former company had, by way of six individual claimants, made cases for both trademark infringement and secondary copyright infringement regarding its image creation model, Stable Diffusion. In its essence, the arguments were that a) Stability AI could be/had been used to generate images which bore Getty Images' watermark, thus infringing on trademark legislation, and b) Stable Diffusion as an entity was an "infringing copy" owing to its model weight training, having been 'fed' Getty Images' works to further its development. As you may have gathered, this is quite technical – stay with me.

To begin with the trademark

infringement claim, where Getty Images were ultimately successful, the case proceedings interrogated both the capacity and real-world use of Stable Diffusion to produce images which bore the former company's watermarks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the court found that experimental prompts like 'news photo' (assumed to be typical enough of an average user's imagination) would yield images with the iSTOCK mark covered by Getty. In answer to this, Stability attempted to bolt ultimate control of the model to its customers, shaking culpability for any of these works' creation. As much was dismissed – as Stability defines the creative vocabulary with which users can prompt, and there is a degree of randomness in the way it reacts to users' prompts, it was ruled that customers cannot be held accountable for what it creates (pertaining to these trademarked images). To digress slightly, as much has become common principle. Take the abominable cases of 'undressing images' which have recently exploded regarding Grok AI. All news coverage has held Grok at fault for first supplying people with the means, then limiting the privilege to paying customers, with which to create invasive, non-consensual content. Little attention has been paid to those perverse enough to request it.

We here encounter the first thematic debate of topical importance, in which we lack any meaningful precedent. How do we calculate the balance of creative control between user and AI in generating an image? It is as if the AI supplies a solution of swirling colours for the palette, the users imprecisely ram an enormous brush into it, and what reaches the canvas is a mixture of oscillating accuracy: some intended, some not. The aspect of randomness is that which, legally, will have to fall to individual cases to determine in the future. And yet, the overall picture is not a pretty one.

Returning to the case, sparing the reader the details of the course of trade, context of use, and goods and services, the court found that Getty Images' claim was upheld on sections 10(1) and (2) of the Trade Marks Act 1994, but not (3). In simplifying terms, despite everything that has already been noted, it was judged that the AI-produced images were not of detriment to Getty's reputation or distinctive character, and did not constitute unfair advantage-taking thereof. As much is predicated on the idea that there has not been, nor will be, a severe shift in the economic tendencies

of company or customer. This strikes me as very case specific – will the proliferating circulation of invalid watermarked images legitimise or inflate Getty's authority? Only time may tell. Is a rudimentary, self-advertising forgery a compliment or an insult? Ask van Meegeren, or better – Goering.

Perhaps with higher stakes of the two acts, Getty's secondary copyright infringement claim posed an existential challenge to all AI image-creation models. The suggestion that Stable Diffusion was an "infringing copy" in its own right hinges on the data that was farmed to 'train' it to the utmost refinement and creative, master-answering exactitude. If successful, the result would actively protect, or ban, AI development from certain data in its final iterations – placing a sanctity on the intellectual property of human invention which would ultimately gatekeep AI from its quest to surpass imitation. 'Cripes', 'blimey', 'that's crazy': all synonyms thereof are suitable reactions. Alas, in its final ruling the court rejected this claim. The decision-making procedure which yielded it is possibly revealing of our legislature's anachronism, and as such a call for revision.

The whole claim rested on Getty's exceptionally broad definition of "infringing copy". That the AI Model itself could be or contain a copy of the work in question as a product of the patterns and features it may have soaked up in its training process is without precedent. Never before in this country has this been argued – but likewise, never before has technology of this construction been placed before the gavel in such a fashion. Avoiding a thorough analysis of section 27(3) of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, suffice it to say that the court decided the model would have to retain a reproduction, in some manifestation, of the copyrighted work to be designated as an "infringing copy". This, in a literal sense, it did not - as such, the claim failed. But the technicality of this assessment is a tricky one. The weights of the model – its calculated tendencies to reproduce certain traits off a given prompt – could not exist without the 'digestion' of the copyrighted work; that the lines of code or data representing its imagery are no longer necessary for the model to function thereafter seems to me a solution too focused on the physicality of the evidence.

The brief caveat and cop-out which I am behoved to provide here is that Getty Images dropped

many of the claims pertaining specifically to the training process itself as it occurred overseas: the copyright deals explicitly with the residue therefrom.

And so, whilst Getty Images may be glad to have won its trademark claim, the overall victor was undoubtedly Stability AI. The sides of angels and devils are not so distinct. It is a jape of rambunctious irony to note that Getty Images has launched its own AI platform. To quote Tortoise John from the cinematic masterpiece *Rango*, 'one day soon all of this is going to fade into myth. The frontier town, the lawman, the gunslinger. There's just no place for them anymore. We're civilized now'. As technology's engines of progress continue to churn at rates not only lamentable but laudable, the law must revise itself and rise to meet it with similarly scintillating innovation. It is no understatement to suggest that the findings of this case were widely accepted as a whimper rather than a bang. Whilst a deluge of claims rips through the states which may hold more eventual bearing on the globe's attitudes thereto, I would like the finest legal minds of this country – whom I clearly do not feature among – to be of principal role in the narrative. Many AI companies are conducting more controversial aspects of their craft, like training, overseas where framework is more explicit and obvious than here – the UK would be foolish to lose out on business through inaction rather than taking a stand one way or the other. 'No man can walk out on his own story', as the Spirit of the West declares.

I understand that this may have come across as critical of the court's ruling, permitting my biases to get the better of me. On the contrary, I feel the law was executed to the letter. My ambition is merely to accelerate the conversation which resolves in the latter's evolution. Indeed, the House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee's Inquiry into AI and Copyright released its progress report in January. Pooling the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and the Intellectual Property Office, the consultation sought harmony between the protection of artists with the engineering of a welcoming ecosystem for AI creative companies. Our proud ranking of No. 2 for intellectual property protection in the 2025 US Chamber of Commerce Global IP Index must be reconciled with the AI boom on which we must

capitalise, or fall behind. Their most ambitious proposal? The Creative Commerce Exchange. This 'new marketplace for selling, buying, licensing, and enabling permitted access to digitised cultural and creative assets' aspires to 'allow content owners to commercialise their assets, while providing data users with ease of access'. Artists retain control, developers their bread. Everyone wins, clarity indulged? Let us see how the pilot plays out.

This is not an issue of art or artist's process of self-definition. Nor is it a jousting match between the techniques of the Old Masters and the innovations in digital image production technology. The discussion orbits the question of what rights the world deems fit to grant art and artist moving forward, on both sides. Freedom-from necessarily infringes on freedom-to. As much is not a poetically, romantically artistic way of draughting our experience of the world. But the shark has its box, the urinal its plinth, and the altarpiece its panelling. The mentality is not a regressive, scotch-and-cigar-shaded one, so much as it concedes that, in this era of radical, accelerated development, we must all revise to know the rules of the game. Even, or perhaps especially, to break them.

RECLINING WOMAN IS SO LAST SEASON

David Lynch's Parisian Nightclub Taught Me How to Engage with Culture

By Eliza Pritchett

On RE:VISION, attention, and why meaning needs bodies

The age old question goes …

“If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound?”

Applied to culture in 2026, the question becomes more uncomfortable.

If humans aren’t inhabiting a cultural space, does it still exist?

Yes, we are surrounded by cultural objects: films, books, buildings, monuments, artworks. They are physically present and materially intact. But cultural presence is not the same as cultural significance. We cannot assume that living among objects deemed ‘cultural’ means we are meaningfully engaging with culture in our daily lives. Presence does not equal participation.

The Courtauld Institute’s 16th East Wing Biennial, RE:VISION, made me question the difference between physical existence and lived meaning. Throughout the exhibition, works sit politely on the walls, waiting. Meaning is not embedded in the object itself; it is activated by the bodies that enter the room. RE:VISION does not behave like a regular exhibition. It continuously folds back on itself, refusing to move forward cleanly. It purposely doesn’t give participants the closure they all seek as they leave.

Crucially, it unravels slowly across time. It is student-led within an institution. It includes a platform for discussion alongside the works themselves. It remains open until 2027. It expects repeat visits. It gains meaning through dialogue and conversation rather than final statements. RE:VISION does not ask to be understood. It asks to be entered.

RE:VISION intrudes gently but persistently onto viewers. Images are reconstructed. Histories are

replayed. The past does not sit safely behind glass. It presses into the present. You are constantly made aware that what you are seeing is already a return.

Artists such as Jeff Wall restage scenes that look documentary but are carefully reconstructed long after the moment has passed. The photograph is already a second or third version. You are not seeing the event. You are seeing the act of going back to it. Pipilotti Rist works through loops, duration, and immersion. Her film stills and installations do not move toward resolution. They repeat, stretch time, and reward staying rather than speed. You drift in and out of attention. Meaning thickens rather than concludes. Yinka Shonibare revisits European histories by re-performing them in ways that expose what was always excluded. The past is not corrected. It is made unstable.

Not all culture needs bodies to function. A novel still exists if no one is reading it. A painting in storage still exists if no one sees it. A film still exists if no one presses play. Their meanings may change when we engage with them, but their existence does not depend on that engagement. They are complete forms. RE:VISION belongs to a different category. Once I noticed this, I realised I had felt the same demand somewhere entirely different….Silencio, a nightclub in Paris designed by David Lynch. Both these environments embody 'activated culture'. Culture that exists as potential… until bodies enter, move, pause, return, and change it. Remove people from RE:VISION and you are left with silent rooms and disconnected works. Remove people from Silencio and you are left with architecture without rhythm. In both cases, meaning does not disappear, it never fully forms in the first place.

Silencio revisits the past not through imagery or reference, but through structure. It does not quote Lynch's cinema. It translates it. The club is broken into distinct rooms with different atmospheres and functions: a red-lit dancefloor, a bar, a cinema, seating areas, and smoking rooms. You move between them constantly, not because you are lost, but because the space encourages circulation. The smoking room matters. It creates a pause. Sound drops. Bodies stop dancing. Conversations slow. Then you re enter noise. That movement between intensity and quiet creates rhythm. Like a film cutting between scenes, the space edits your experience.

Lighting does the same work. The red-lit dancefloor compresses bodies and heightens physical

awareness. Elsewhere, the lighting is flatter, dimmer, almost neutral. You feel yourself shift between modes. You are not meant to stay in one emotional register. This is what it means for cinema to become space and narrative to become movement. There is no storyline being told to you. The way you move through the space creates sequence. Meaning forms through circulation, not explanation. Silencio exists independently of whether you have seen Mulholland Drive. In fact, not having seen it strengthens the argument. The fascination comes from conscious activation, not recognition.

One of the clearest moments where this logic became visible was during a performance at Silencio. A woman stood in one of the rooms repeating a single phrase: "zero is a snake." There was no beginning, no explanation, no ending. She layered the words on top of each other, sometimes overlapping them, sometimes slowing them down, sometimes speeding them up. The phrase was spoken until it lost clear meaning and became rhythm instead. Sound. Presence. You were not meant to decode it. You were meant to sit with it as it circled. Meaning did not arrive. It accumulated. This is revision in action.

This way of engaging with culture is rarely taught. Most cultural spaces are designed around single-use attention. Enter, extract, move on. Interpretation becomes a form of closure. The Courtauld's first homework challenged this model. We were asked to choose a single artwork and simply sit with it. Our aim was two hours. The exercise originates from Jennifer L. Roberts, who asks her students to spend several hours with one artwork before writing anything. No note-taking. Just looking and letting attention change. The artwork does not change. The viewer does. RE:VISION and Silencio assume this shift is possible. They do not reward speed or first impressions. They reward commitment.

We live in a culture that values immediacy. Everything is explained, summarised, and consumed once. Deep meaning feels unfashionable because it demands time.

RE:VISION and Silencio quietly resist this. They do not deliver meaning. They activate it. They remind us that we are not consumers of culture, but co-producers of it. Our presence matters. Our return matters. Our attention is not passive.

Without bodies, these spaces are just potential.

With bodies, they come alive.

So the question is no longer whether culture exists without us. It is whether we are willing to exist with culture long enough for it to mean anything.

Both ask the same thing.

Stay.

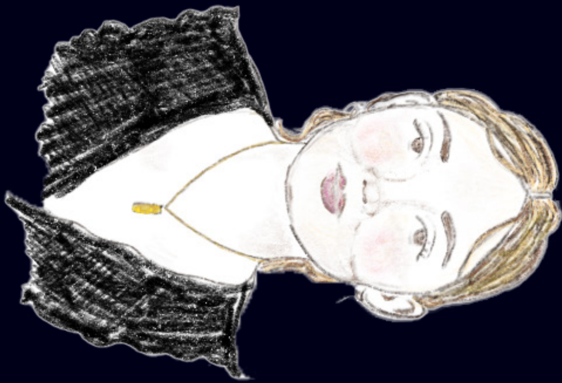
Return.

Let meaning change.

And let yourself change with it.

By Tien Albert, Editor-in-Chief

The East Wing Biennial install period transpired to be a single hectic week in which two years' worth of works were finally hung, crossing the border between imagination and reality. On the fifth day of the install, just a few weeks out from opening night, The Courtauldian sat down with RE:VISION's Director, Romy Brill Allen, and Head Curator, Madeline Cheeseman, in the recently rehung Research Forum, to find out more about the exhibition.



By Dana Aben

RE:CONTRACT

Rewriting the terms of visibility and belonging

RE:VISION In Conversation *is a platform for discussion, contemplation and discourse with and between the artists featured in RE:VISION. Each event in this series of panels takes place at Vernon Square and is chaired and devised by RE:VISION Director Romy Brill Allen. These conversations about artistic practice are designed to promote community and open conversation.*

The second *In Conversation* panel of the East Wing Biennial's sixteenth edition, RE:VISION, held at Vernon Square, brought together the practices of Bhawana Jain, Elizabeth O'Farrelly, and Mamu Unu under the theme RE:CONTRACT. Rather than treating "contract" as a singular concept, the discussion unfolded the term in its multiple meanings: as legal agreement, social obligation, spatial compression, and strategic withdrawal. Contract emerged not as a document to be signed, but as a condition that governs how bodies, images, and histories are permitted to take up space. What was proposed was not a new category of work, but a reframing. A way of rereading exhibited works through a shared conceptual lens.

The works discussed during the panel were not originally conceived under the banner of RE:CONTRACT. They were drawn from different rooms of the exhibition, including RE:ASSERT, RE:PLACE, and

RE:ACT, each concerned with questions of visibility, identity, belonging, and memory. Grouped together under this new title, the works demonstrated a striking adaptability, revealing how meaning shifts as artworks are repositioned and asked to perform new conceptual labour. This act of regrouping did not erase their original contexts; instead, it activated latent concerns already embedded within them. RE:CONTRACT thus functioned less as a thematic container than as a process of revision enacted in real time, foregrounding the mobility of meaning and the capacity of artworks to enter into new relations with curatorial frameworks and audiences.

Across the discussion, to contract was understood as both binding and constraining. A contract promises stability and mutual recognition, yet it also fixes roles, expectations, and futures. This tension became a productive way of thinking about visibility and scale. Who is required to be visible in order to belong? Who is allowed opacity? Whose labour sustains the contract once its symbolic moment has passed? These questions echo French Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant and his *Poetics of Relation* (1997), in which he insists on the right to opacity, the refusal of total legibility demanded by systems that equate understanding with control. Rather than treating visibility as an unqualified good, the panel foregrounded withholding, compression, and refusal as strategies of agency.

These concerns were made especially legible in Mamu Unu's photographic work, *Social Contract* (2022), which originally appears within RE:ASSERT, a room grounded in the politics of opacity and refusal. The image depicts a wedding scene set against a dense black ground. Three figures stand side by side: the bride in a voluminous white dress, the groom dressed in black, and a third officiant wearing patterned fabric. Faces are absent, swallowed by shadow. Identity is communicated only through clothing and social role. The photograph is based on a real wedding that Unu attended, a documentary moment subsequently edited, darkened, and stripped of personal identifiers. In removing faces and context, Unu transforms a lived event into a meditation on expectation.

Read within RE:ASSERT, the work foregrounds opacity as resistance, denying the viewer access to expression or interiority. Regrouped under RE:CONTRACT, however, the image takes on a sharper social and cul-

tural specificity. In many Nigerian contexts, marriage is positioned as a significant social milestone, often imagined as an end goal that promises legitimacy, stability, and fulfilment, not only for the couple but for families and communities. The wedding ceremony becomes a highly visible marker of success, its rituals and aesthetics carefully orchestrated and publicly affirmed. Unu's intervention disrupts this narrative by refusing visibility at precisely the moment it is most expected.

The bride's dress, traditionally associated with spectacle and celebration, appears heavy and immobilising, exaggerated against the surrounding darkness. Rather than illuminating the subject, the image withholds access, exposing the structure of the social contract itself. What happens after the ceremony concludes? What follows once the contract is signed, the photograph taken, and the audience disperses? By erasing facial expression and emotional cues, Unu shifts attention away from the performance of joy and toward the uncertainty that lies beyond the frame. The darkness that envelops the figures suggests not absence but aftermath, a space in which the promises of the contract must be lived, negotiated, and sustained.

Under the lens of RE:CONTRACT, the work no longer reads solely as a refusal of visibility, but as a critique of how social agreements are idealised, aestheticised, and rarely interrogated for their consequences. Marriage appears not as a resolution, but as the beginning of an ongoing negotiation shaped by obligation, endurance, and unequal expectation. By contracting visibility, Unu opens a space for questioning the stability and completeness often attributed to social contracts.

A similar shift in emphasis occurs when Bhawana Jain's work, Sahan Shakti ('The Strength to Endure') (2025) is read through the framework of contract rather than place. Originally positioned within RE:PLACE, her practice engages deeply with ecology, ancestry, and systems of belonging. Her imagery often situates the human body within broader organic networks, foregrounding interdependence rather than autonomy. In a vivid red composition threaded with branching, root-like forms, a female figure appears embedded within an environment that evokes veins, roots, or neural pathways. Scale is deliberately unsettled: the body is neither monumental nor marginal, but relational.

Reframed under RE:CONTRACT, these ecological concerns take on

the character of inherited obligation. Jain's engagement with ecopoiesis, the making and sustaining of environments, becomes a way of thinking about responsibility across generations. Roots signal lineage, memory, and the invisible labour of care, suggesting that some contracts are never formally agreed upon yet profoundly shape identity. To be born into a family, a culture, or a landscape is to enter into a set of unspoken agreements that structure belonging and responsibility. Jain's work makes these contracts visible, insisting that endurance and care are not passive conditions but active forms of labour.

Preservation is central to this understanding. Jain's practice often involves holding space for voices, memories, and places at risk of erasure. In a cultural climate oriented toward speed, novelty, and constant renewal, this act of preservation resists a contract that equates progress with forgetting. Read through RE:CONTRACT, her work reframes endurance as a form of resistance, a refusal to relinquish responsibility for what has been inherited.

Elizabeth O'Farrelly's practice similarly reveals how meaning shifts through recontextualisation. Her miniature installations and stop-motion animations are frequently discussed in relation to intimacy, memory, and temporal reactivation. Under RE:CONTRACT, through her miniature *Shrinking, Shrinking* (2024), these qualities become ways of thinking about attention as a negotiated resource. A small, illuminated installation resembling a theatrical box demands proximity: to see it, the viewer must bend, crouch, and lean in, physically contracting their own body to meet the scale of the work. This enforced closeness disrupts conventional spectatorship, replacing distant overview with embodied attention.

The miniature reconfigures power by refusing spectacle. Rather than commanding attention, it requires it. Time slows, detail accumulates, and meaning emerges through sustained engagement. O'Farrelly's use of stop-motion animation extends this logic temporally, contracting time into discrete gestures that make labour visible through repetition. The past is not simply represented but reassembled, frame by frame, revealing how histories are edited, preserved, and replayed. Contraction, here, operates not as loss but as intensity, a means of holding time tightly enough to feel its weight.

The regrouping of these works under RE:CONTRACT foregrounds the

flexibility of artistic meaning and the active role of curatorial framing. Contracts, like exhibitions, are not permanent. They are drafted, revised, and sometimes broken. The panel demonstrated how artworks do not merely illustrate themes but can be reactivated through new conceptual alignments, revealing how social, cultural, and temporal contracts operate as ongoing processes rather than singular events.

The panel itself enacted this logic. Structured as an open conversation rather than a definitive statement, it positioned dialogue as a collective form of contracting, one that values multiplicity over consensus. In keeping with the ethos of RE:VISION, revision was framed not as correction, but as an ongoing negotiation that resists closure.

If RE:VISION invites us to look again, RE:CONTRACT asks us to read the fine print. Who has agreed to these terms? Who has been excluded from the negotiation? And what might it mean to leave a contract deliberately unfinished? Across the works discussed, contraction emerges not as withdrawal but as strategy, a way of concentrating attention, protecting interiority, and questioning inherited expectations. Rather than resolving the question of who gets to take up space, RE:CONTRACT insists that the terms remain open, negotiable, and subject to revision.

English Magic:

A Look at the Work of Jeremy Deller

Pip Johnson

On the evening of the 16th East Wing Biennial, I momentarily escaped my friends and the Courtauld's crowded common room to watch Jeremy Deller's *English Magic*. The film, originally commissioned in 2012, formed part of Deller's exhibition representing Great Britain at the 2013 Venice Biennale. I was pleased to see that it summed up all that I love about Deller's art and practice.

The film opens with footage of people setting up for recording at a studio. This is revealed to be the Melodians Steel Orchestra at Abbey Road Studio Two. Deller is setting the scene for the film to come. Music often plays an essential role in his work, revealing his interest in the inherent relationship between art, music, and popular culture. The orchestra covers three songs over the course of the film: Vaughan William's *Symphony No.5*, A Guy Called Gerald's *Voodoo Ray* and David Bowie's *The Man Who Sold the World*. Performed on steel drums, the music takes on an ethereal and haunting quality. This is accentuated by the next few minutes in which we see slow motion footage of birds of prey. An array of owls and eagles sweep down, their feathers ruffling and their huge claws demonstrating how they are simultaneously beautiful but threatening. They are immensely powerful, and by slowing the footage, Deller encourages the viewer to appreciate them fully, to take in their details. The montage is an impressive display, and takes on a calming, appreciative and meditative quality, as if Deller is slowing time as he presents these birds in their full glory.

The film is underlined with a sense of humour and irony. Following the footage of the birds, Deller switches to looking at cars being crushed in a scrapyard. Just as the machine's yellow claws encircle the cars, so do the birds' talons. Such scenes of destruction are juxtaposed with the upbeat soundtrack of *Voodoo Ray*, embodying a sense of playfulness and amusement. By creating a parallel between bird and machine, Deller is perhaps noting how humans, technology, industry are always rooted in something that has come before – humanity mirroring nature.

Amusement is a continual theme in Deller's work and fully presents

itself when footage of *Sacrilege*, a life-size inflatable Stonehenge replica, is shown. The scene is filled with joy as people of all ages enjoy the artwork. They run, jump, and cartwheel on it. This level of interaction was lovely to see and made me think of how Deller's work in many ways destabilises the world of fine art. He removes art from its typical, untouchable pedestal in the gallery, and places it amongst the public. Moreover, Deller's artworks are brought to life through people's engagement, revealing the fundamental relationship between people and art, and the importance of interacting with art at all ages. Deller's work caters to all – it is inclusive and fun, continually offering different readings for different perspectives.

Such subjectivity is something I admired very much in the film. It features no dialogue or face-to-face contact with those it features, relying purely on visuals and sound. Perhaps this is the wisest option, also, as it allows the viewer to make up their own mind about how the film presents English culture – something likely to cause dispute and conflict if the film were to put forward a concrete, objective view. Therefore, *English Magic* offers one possible artistic interpretation of the country, its layers of culture and the diversity it encompasses.

Following scenes of *Sacrilege*, the film returns to Abbey Road as the orchestra plays Bowie's *The Man Who Sold the World*. This was one of my favourite moments of the film and it is poignant watching and writing about Bowie as ten years have now passed since his departure from this world. Their rendition is haunting yet charming and celebratory, and it soundtracks a sequence of scenes of the Lord Mayor's Show, a traditional parade held in the City of London each year. It is the "oldest, longest, best loved and least-rehearsed civic procession in the world," according to the official website, and Deller's film joyfully captures its chaotic and collective atmosphere. With floats, costumes and all-round colour, the streets and architecture of the city are transformed into a place of performance and community, and, again, amusement and fun are at play. Deller is also interested in communities and collectives, as the procession sees all sorts of groups, such as paramedics, Lightmongers and Freemasons, putting on shows, some in uniform or regalia. The juxtaposition between these professionals

and their cheerful displays turns each collective into a moving work of art, a spectacle for the gathered crowds. As such, this scene sums up how the artist takes elements of culture and tradition, embedded in the country's history, things we might overlook or take for granted, and reframes them as of heightened interest.

Having been a fan of Deller's work for a while, watching *English Magic* made me think about what I like most about his art. I am intrigued by Deller's interest in magic – the word features both in the title of his film and in the name of his book, *Art is Magic*. In the summer before I started at The Courtauld, I bought a copy of Deller's book. It is by far one of my most treasured art books. Not only does it provide an insight into the artist's work, from his own perspective and written very much in his own voice, but it acts as a kind of guidebook. I find it inspiring how he interweaves history, music, social commentary and more into his work. I like also how his work is hard to define – it is not reserved to one medium, but encompasses all, and is often collaborative, interested, and celebratory. *English Magic* brings all these elements together. Deller's reference to magic hints at the importance of art in being the utmost source of inspiration, in allowing us to look to the past, respond to the present and rethink the future.

Deller's work should be an inspiration to all, and a figure in the art world to be turned to. A phrase of his I think often on is that "art is a way of staying in love with the world." There is much truth in this! To look at art is the greatest joy. Such art as Deller's teaches us the importance of looking to the world around us, not only for inspiration but to learn more about ourselves and the diverse society we live in.

Let's All Go Blue in the Face

By Max Spendlove

I don't know if they are there yet, but my drawings are going to be hung up in the common room at Vernon Square. I drew them live, in front of a lot of people at the RE:VISION opening. It would be very romantic to say that even though my hands were shaking and I was breaking down, I still pulled through and won. But to be frank, it wasn't nearly as scary as I thought it was going to be. I was surrounded by friends who came up to talk, compliment (more than I deserved), and literally just to stand with me. I was very well-guarded by very generous people, so I felt fine.

That being said, I can't even begin to express how unusual this display, or even acknowledgement, of my work is for me. Even as early as a few months ago, my practice consisted of two things: inspiration and a shoebox. My inspiration (I'll say more on this later) has been kind of a constant. The shoebox was essentially my portfolio. Everything I drew, and I drew every night, went into the shoebox.

It wasn't until two close friends opened the shoebox and quite literally emptied it onto the floor that I even considered its contents were worth looking at. I had thought they were at one point, but I had forgotten. To me, they were still imperfect, but regardless they were out. What's more is now my friends' grubby hands were all over them. They were asking the dreaded question "why?". Did I even know the answer to that question? Believe it or not, this is not an account of me accepting my own artistic powers; this is an account of the conversation that runs parallel to it, the conversation entangled with "why?" On the night the box was turned over, I was made to discuss–out loud—what inspired me.

For me, it has always been common culture—pulp culture. The things I loved when I was little didn't leave me, rather something else grew around them. I am no longer the kid that read, watched, and received these stories, but I feel pushed to understand their timelessness. I can't describe it any other way than that I feel totally devoted to their simplicity, and the openness

it can achieve. Even the most formidable conceptual artist will have a story that lives in their heart, a story with no tricks and no turns. A story with very legible illustrations. That's not a scholarly point, by the way, it's a personal one.

To elaborate, I will tell you a story. Over break, I reread A Wrinkle In Time, by Madeleine L'Engle. Lots of American kids read the book at school age, as did I, though I didn't read it in school, but in a book club created by a family friend whose members were me, her, and my twin brother. When I read the book the first time it flowed right through me and sort of vanished. It was lacking what I really liked, so I let it go. But as a semi-grown-up I found an interest in science fiction, and, obviously, literature aimed at kids. So when I picked up A Wrinkle In Time, it was a truly special experience. To my earlier point, reading a children's book as an adult is, in my opinion, not really reading a children's book at all. It is the act of surrendering yourself to a simple narrative with plain metaphors and no tricks, and just seeing what you can do with it. I'll say more about that later.

The cover is the same one I had when I was little. It's the one with gold lettering announcing the title in a black, starry void, with elements of the story rotating in epic motion around it. To me, it looks precious, almost expensive. As for the words inside, I will have to give a bit of a synopsis as I think the book is less known in the UK. The book follows Meg, her brother Charles Wallace, and Calvin O'Keefe—a random classmate—on a quest to find Meg's missing father. They meet three interterrestrial beings: Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Who, who help them 'tesser', L'Engle's invented mode of interterrestrial travel. In doing so they must face IT, a simple one-to-one allegory of general misery, the 'forces of evil' that plague all of the planets of the universe. The Mrs W's are beings of goodness that are fighting the fight against IT, but they also acknowledge other great warriors in the fight: for example, literally every artist ever.

At the end of the book, Meg must return to Camasotz—IT's resident plant—to rescue her brother Charles Wallace. Up until this point the narrative has positioned the protagonists as being two exceptional children and one plain one: Meg. Still, it is Meg who has to do it, so the Mrs. W's give their last gifts to help her on her final tesser. Mrs. Whatsit offers:

"I give you my love, Meg. Always remember that."

And she does! When IT tries to loosen Meg's grip on herself it tells her that Mrs. Whatsit hates her, something L'Engle describes as a 'fatal mistake.' Meg remembers what Mrs. Whatsit told her and the key to ending IT's power is revealed. Surprise, it's love. Surprise, I cried.

People on the internet did not cry, in fact, it was more the opposite. Ok, most of the reviews still skew positive, but the negative ones stood out for a very specific reason: the words 'trite', 'flat', even 'cringe' were all over them. The word 'flat' specifically was used by one user (whom I hate personally) called Paige. Everything about the book was 'flat' to her and, in her opinion, children deserve better because they are far more complex than anybody gives them credit for. This reaction to the pulp, 'low' narrative is actually pulpy in and of itself. It is bought at a very low cost by all sorts of people, and with little thought. The flat and the banal is seen as a narrative that is too easy, and is totally rejected altogether. Children deserve better. Tell me, Paige, what exactly do the children want? Do they want what you want, that is, the sheer height and majesty of adult literature?

I hope I've remembered, as best I can, what thinking like a child actually feels like. Despite what Paige says, to think like a child is not to hunger for more per se, rather it is to receive everything. You are moving through a world that is constructed by gods: adults. There is nothing you can do about that fact; you must go where you are made to go, you must read what there is to read. In the world of children the flat is something you must encounter and interpret. 'IT' is a facet you see in the pantheon that occupies your space and controls you. In short, the intelligence of children is as remarkable for its capacity to understand as it is for its capacity to accept what there is, and change it into something useful. That openness is what inspires me. It is the armor that protects a story's journey through time: very basic building blocks.

The pieces that I drew for the East Wing Biennial are reflections of those core tenants of my inspiration. There are no tricks. There are real people depicted, but some of them are completely made up. When I did them, maybe I was imagining some story these hallucinated figures were involved in, but that shouldn't matter at all to the viewer. If I could have my way, half of the work would be done by the viewer. Look at them, make up your own story, or don't look at them. Ignoring what you don't like (just ignoring, not inventing

some academic reason why they have no validity) would actually be a reflection of the childishness I hope to evoke in my work.

I am actually much prouder to be talking openly about what inspires me. While I am an amateur artist, I quite frankly revere my own inspiration. Unfortunately, that realization came after meeting so many uninspired people who were masking as artists. You can only go through so many people who have unlimited resources, the coolest clothes, the best hair, and absolutely nothing to say, before you become frustratingly aware of what true pretence looks like. To be clear, I don't believe everybody's inspiration looks like mine, nor does it have to. I believe inspiration can be as big or small as it likes, and that most people are actually very sincerely inspired, even if that inspiration isn't used. And still, some people talk as if they are sitting on something genius, so much so it has to be kept a secret, or deserves sly acts of self-importance. I disagree with that. I disagree with the space it puts between artist and audience. I disagree with the fact that it makes the artist look remarkable and inhuman. If you've spent enough time with something, you should have the words to tell me about it. They don't have to be good or erudite or even coherent, but if you have nothing to say and still expect an audience—to me, that's bad. Worse than not having a formal art education, and much worse than not being stylish.

The pieces are out of my control now, and I can't stand in front of them telling everybody what inspires me. I can't sleep at Vernon Square. So, what happens? They face the same fate some try desperately to avoid, the same fate that I faced at the opening night, the same fate I guess we know all art faces: it's going to pass through some, appeal to some, and completely repel others. I want to finish by saying that my 'performance' that night has almost no value except, in my opinion, what it could mean for what constitutes an art space. If the internet begins to become more and more unreliable, the art space will have to become—hopefully more equitable–and more physical; it will be the only way to prove you made something. In a world like that, you'll have to bring your inspiration with you, you'll have to know what it is, and you'll probably have to defend it. And if you share a room with others, blowing cigarette smoke in their faces and batting your eyelashes won't go down well. You'll just have to talk about your own excitement. In my opinion, you'll have to go blue in the face talking about what inspires you.

Distribution

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